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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 001138

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TAGS: PREL MOPS KPKO SO ET  
SUBJECT: SOMALIA: TFG AND ASWJ EXPLORING ALLIANCE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶11. (S/NF) Summary. Al Sunnah wal Jama'a (ASWJ) leadership committee member Mahdi Dahir Sheikh Nur (Darood) told PolOff on May 12 that the ASWJ leadership committee would be arriving in Addis Ababa during the week of May 17 to hold discussions with Transitional Federal Government (TFG) Deputy Prime Minister Sharif Hassan and the Ethiopian government in a continuation of their attempt to form an alliance. Mahdi said the Ethiopians were supportive of an alliance, but the TFG was resisting because it fears being "swallowed" by ASWJ. Mahdi envisioned an arrangement with the TFG whereby central and southern Somalia would be divided between them until they had cleared Somalia of extremists. Then the two sides would integrate into a formal government of some fashion. He hoped Washington would support such an arrangement and asked for financial and military support from the United States. Post would welcome Washington's guidance on the issue of a possible alliance, and what role, if any, we should play. (Note: It is unclear whether this committee represents all Somalia ASWJ members in East Africa, but it is clear that they are responsible for the ASWJ militias fighting against al-Shabaab. End Note.) End Summary.

TFG Resisting Alliance, Ethiopia Supportive

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¶12. (S/NF) According to Mahdi, both the leadership council of ASWJ and Sharif Hassan would be arriving in Addis Ababa during the week of May 17 to negotiate a possible alliance. Addis Ababa was chosen as the venue because both sides wanted a third party arbitrator to oversee the negotiations. Mahdi said in April he met with Hassan and TFG Minister for Post and Telecommunications Abdirizak Osman Jirule, aka "Dr. Jurile," to initiate serious discussions on the formation of a secret pact which would constitute a kind of alliance between ASWJ and the TFG. He said the Ethiopian government was supportive on an alliance, and that Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles told Sheikh Sharif that Sharif had no option but to ally with ASWJ, or the TFG would not survive. He said the TFG had been resisting because they feared that eventually the TFG would be "swallowed" by ASWJ. Nevertheless, he said the TFG was on the verge of collapse, and if they wanted to survive, they might agree to a deal. Mahdi told PolOff on May 14 that he had spoken to Hassan that morning, and that Hassan had pledged to come to Addis with the full power to negotiate.

¶13. (S/NF) Mahdi said he and Sharif Hassan were "old friends" and had worked together on and off for years. He said he and Hassan had helped form the Rahanweyn Resistance Army (RRA) together, and that the name "RRA" was first

conceived in his home.

ASWJ's Terms of the Agreement

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¶4. (S/NF) In Mahdi's view, the agreement would divide central and southern Somalia between the TFG and ASWJ, assigning each areas to control to rid them of the extremists. ASWJ would assume responsibility for Gedo, Bay and Bakool, part of Hiraan, and Galguduud, while the TFG would take responsibility for Mogadishu and the rest while sharing resources and intelligence. Then, in approximately two years when the extremists have been defeated, a more formal arrangement could be made incorporating ASWJ into the TFG. Mahdi thought it was only natural that ASWJ would become the dominant influence with the future Somali government. Mahdi insisted, however, that Sheikh Sharif would have to publicly distance himself from the extremists, and condemn their actions to show that Sharif had taken a stand against the extremist form of Islam. Mahdi also said the TFG needed to be "disinfected" of extremists.

Mahdi: "The TFG Won't Survive Without Us"

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¶5. (S/NF) Mahdi did not believe the TFG would survive without assistance from ASWJ, but he admitted that if the TFG fell, ASWJ would not be able hold back al-Shabaab on its own.

Therefore, in his view, it was in both the TFG's and ASWJ's interest that they ally. He opined that it may already be too late as the TFG appears on the brink of collapsing under

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attacks by the opposition, but he asserted that ASWJ was now fielding 1,000 fighters and 25 technicals (pick-up trucks with mounted heavy weapons). He said if an agreement could be reached quickly, ASWJ could have those forces to Mogadishu within a day. He said most of ASWJ's forces were in Galguduud, but there were 150 men in Dolo and 300 men in Lower Juba.

¶6. (S/NF) The problem with the TFG, Mahdi said, was that the three parts of their security forces refused to work together or support each other. He said the former TFG forces, Qeybdiid's police forces, and the former Islamic Courts militias did not trust each other and would not come to each other's aid. He thought Sheikh Sharif was too weak to be able to force the different groups to work together. Nor was he sure whether Minister of Interior Affairs Sheikh Abdulkadir Ali Omar was truly loyal to Sheikh Sharif. With the surrender of Inda Adde's and Gobale's weapons to al-Shabaab, and the weapons al-Shabaab captured from the TFG in the recent fighting, al-Shabaab now controlled most of the weapons in Mogadishu and most of the city, he assessed.

Al-Shabaab's Plan for AMISOM?

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¶7. (S/NF) Mahdi thought that al-Shabaab's primary goal was to defeat the TFG and force Sheikh Sharif from power. Once that was done, al-Shabaab would then open a corridor for AMISOM to get to the port, and give AMISOM a fixed time period in which to evacuate from Somalia, leaving their weapons and vehicles behind.

Looking for Washington's Blessing...

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¶8. (S/NF) Mahdi hoped that Washington would support the alliance and pressure the TFG to come to terms. PolOff observed that, sooner or later, the TFG and ASWJ would have to come to terms with each other, but reminded Mahdi that Washington's policy was to support the TFG as the government of Somalia. PolOff said Washington probably would welcome ASWJ support for the TFG, but he could not comment on substance of what Mahdi was proposing. PolOff noted that

Washington would need time to consider this matter.

...And Washington's Support

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¶9. (S/NF) Mahdi also made a pitch for financial and military assistance from the United States. He said if the TFG fell, and ASWJ did not get help, ASWJ would have no choice but to retreat. He said while he only had 1,000 men, thousands more could be recruited and armed with additional resources. Mahdi stated that up until now, ASWJ had been largely funding itself, with a little assistance from Ethiopia, but that those resources were insufficient and would run out.

ASWJ Seeking More Ethiopian Military Support

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¶10. (S/NF) The leadership council was planning to meet with Ethiopian FM Seyoum Mesfin on May 18 to plead for additional support, Mahdi said. ASWJ was getting a small amount of ammunition from the Ethiopians, he noted, but he complained that the Ethiopians were refusing to give them the weapons they were asking for. He hoped the Ethiopians would increase their support.

ASWJ Reorganizing to Form a "Network"

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¶11. (S/NF) Regarding ASWJ itself, Mahdi said the group had split from Sheikh Mahamoud in Jeddah. He said his group did not want a single leader, rather they had organized themselves "like a starfish," with a flat organization government by committee. He said if the group stayed under one leader it would become too political. He insisted their focus now was only on defeating al-Shabaab. Later, when al-Shabaab was defeated they would move into formal Somali politics. Mahdi asserted that the only two organizations in Somalia that were not clan-based were al-Shabaab and ASWJ.

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Comment

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¶12. (S/NF) We would welcome Washington's guidance on how to approach this issue and whether Washington supports some type of arrangement between the TFG and ASWJ. Certainly, at some point the two sides will need to accommodate each other if the TFG is to succeed. The fact that ASWJ is the only force in Somalia that has defeated al-Shabaab, and holds territory cleared of the extremists, gives weight to Mahdi's comments. This is an accomplishment the TFG cannot claim. At a minimum, we believe that the group is worth engaging with to determine who they are, and their true intentions, particularly if the TFG were to collapse. Although Mahdi repeatedly insisted that his group "did not have political intentions now," there should be no doubt that at the end of the day, they intend to become a dominant political force within Somalia. Given their strong objection to Wahhabism and other forms of Islamic extremism, that may not be such a bad thing. End Comment.

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